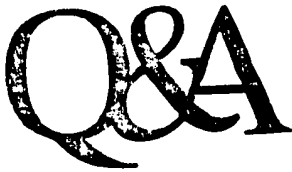


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CIA handbook described as innocuous

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Ray Cline on the CIA handbook controversy.

Ray Cline was deputy assistant director of the Central Intelligence Agency from 1962-1966 and played a major role in the Cuban missile crisis in 1962. He is currently a senior associate and professor of international relations at Georgetown University's Center for Strategic and International Studies. Mr. Cline was asked his opinions about the CIA handbook controversy by Washington Times reporter Bill Outlaw.

Q: You said you believe there are some major misperceptions about the CIA manual used by the Contras in Nicaragua. Would you outline them?

A: I think the basic misperception is that the CIA drafted and issued virtually as an instruction a handbook on assassination and murder for guerrillas. There is the misperception that the CIA is running that war, that it has complete control of it, and if a document appears, it's a CIA document.

All of the handbooks that have surfaced that are being used by Contra soldiers are issued by the headquarters command of the FDN, the Democratic Force for Nicaragua, the Contras.

It is true there were some CIA staff officers down there in the area with their headquarters. And according again to the congressman's [Rep. Edward P. Boland, D-Mass.] comment on the subject, they had an opportunity to critique and perhaps object to terms in the Contra handbook. But I think it is important to recognize the CIA did not draft or issue any booklet or manual as a military instruction to do anything.

They perhaps should have intervened to change language offensive — that seems to be offensive — to Americans, but that's about the maximum charge you could make against the CIA in what in my view is not a terribly important document.

Now, let's turn to the documents themselves. There is a misperception that it's a sort of Bible for the guerrillas, but it's only a psychological operations manual. That manual is not really a handbook at all. It is a document evidently printed in Spanish for distribution to certain psychological warfare experts in the Contra force.

It outlines what were described as lecture notes on the education of psychological warfare teams who would go into the villages of Nicaragua to win the minds and hearts of the villagers to democracy against communism.

If you read the document that has been distributed, as in an English translation by the Congressional Research Service, you will find that it is very much like old handbooks of instruction prepared as much as 20 years ago by Che Guevara and Ho Chi Minh. It is particularly reminiscent to me of some of Mao Tse-tung's early instructions to guerrilla warriors.

It apparently was based almost entirely upon a U.S. Army document prepared in 1968 at Fort Bragg, N.C., for Special Service Forces fighting in Vietnam. Perhaps people have forgotten, but I remember that Jack Kennedy and Bobby Kennedy were extremely enthusiastic supporters of what was called counter-insurgency in that day, counter-efforts, efforts to go into the villages and protect the people from, in that case, North Vietnamese guerrilla warriors, and try to hold the political allegiance of the villagers for Saigon rather than Hanoi.

This little document they're all talking about was exactly that kind of a document. The language is almost identical except that the phrases used to prepare for the communist revolution and the expulsion of the American imperialists says you must persuade people to support a democratic, Christian, fair, decent government in Nicaragua, and replace the

officials who have sold out their country to the Cubans and the Russians by installing a Marxist-Leninist dictatorship.

Q: Do you think there could have been any other meaning, other than assassinate, that could have been intended instead of the word "neutralize"?

A: The manual clearly indicates in its most controversial section that if there are Sandinista officials, judges and magistrates running the village, they should be brought into the public square, and a public tribunal of all the townspeople should be established to discuss what to do about them.

There is a passage indicating that you should avoid harming them, but there is an undercurrent that they ought to be removed from their jobs.

This passage, this section, begins with a curious statement: "It is possible to neutralize the Sandinista officials." It doesn't say do it, but it goes on to discuss bringing the public tribunal together, and it certainly suggests that if the whole village thought that the officials were murderers and crooks, that they might well pronounce a death sentence on them.

I don't think that's excluded, but the manual doesn't really say that. The closest it comes is to say "neutralize" these officials.

Now my experience in almost 40 years in intelligence is that neutralize is a very convenient, very vague word. One of the ways you neutralize a communist official in a village, anywhere, is to provide somebody in that village with derogatory information about him. He's a murderer or a crook or a wife-beater or most anything you can [use] to reduce his stature, his efficiency, his ability to do his job. So neutralize is not a technical term exactly equivalent with assassination.

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I would say that 99 percent of American commentators, both in the media and in the Congress, have not read any of that book except for the sentence that someone showed them saying it is possible to neutralize these Sandinista officials, and with everyone being faithful James Bond-spy novel readers, they jump to the romantic conclusion that the main business of the CIA is to get people murdered, and therefore the FDN was handing out a handbook saying to murder people.

Q: If this handbook's objectives are primarily psychological, as you have indicated, what would be the objectives of the CIA in Nicaragua?

A: I think the objectives of the CIA in Nicaragua were mainly to use the Contra guerrilla warfare efforts to damage the Sandinista regime enough to prevent it from assisting revolution in El Salvador and other nearby countries.

So there is a different purpose on the part of the American elements supporting the Contras and the high command of the Contras themselves.

The Congress evidently originally approved of President Reagan's plan to use support to the Contras for this purpose of helping stabilize El Salvador, which is a goal of American policy openly. But the Contras have their own goals, and that's the point I think you have to recognize. CIA does not control the Contra force; they provide it money and probably weapons and uniforms and perhaps help them write handbooks, but the force, the Democratic Force of Nicaragua, is a sizable guerrilla army and it is fighting to persuade most Nicaraguans that they ought to chuck out the Sandinista government and accept the democratic one.

Now if you really want to know what the goals of the Contras are, you should read a small handbook called "The Blue and the White," after the Nicaraguan flag, which is distributed to everybody so that every Contra can wear it in their shirt pocket.

Q: You're suggesting that the attention given the so-called CIA manual was done primarily for political reasons?

A: I'm suggesting — in fact, I'm asserting — that I cannot imagine this document being distributed and given so much media attention if it were not the presidential election period... that it is an attempt by those people who are strongly against American assistance to the democratic forces in Central America, who are against President Reagan's denunciation of communist regimes in Central America, to find some objectionable phrases in a document and tag it as a CIA document — which it is not — and blame the president for having a term like "neutralize," which they interpreted quickly and readily as murder and assassination not identical to that term, so as to have a political issue here in the weeks before the election.

I cannot explain any other reason why what is clearly a technical document of no great interest, full of very pedestrian things like how to make military camps and how to post guards and that sort of thing, for the most part, and out of 40 some pages a couple of paragraphs were found which have two words in them which are considered incitement to violence and blamed on the CIA. It's what I must call old-fashioned, mid-1970s' CIA bashing, and it is aimed at weakening the Central Intelligence Agency and weakening the president who is supporting the CIA.

Q: In your opinion, based on your experience in the CIA, could this manual have been reviewed at high levels of the CIA, as has been suggested?

A: In my experience, which I admit was in happier days more than 10 years ago, the CIA would never feel it important to review a manual of this particular kind at high levels. It wouldn't be worth the effort. There probably would be some review at lower levels to avoid phrasing that would sound bad in American ears, but essentially they would be passing on a document for foreign use, and it would go with the local usage.

I'm quite sure that the way the word neutralize came in the Spanish translation [of the manual] is the way the Spanish refer to a situation of removing or replacing officials by whatever methods were necessary — initially by persuasion.

Q: Do you think the CIA was doing anything different in the way of covert activities in Nicaragua than it has in other areas of the world at other times?

A: No. I think the CIA has been very limited in its covert action operations in the last 10 or 15 years especially.

I think this support to the Contras in Nicaragua is very namby-pamby and probably not as professional as it should be because of the feeling that almost anything is very likely to be a cause celebre in the American press and hence in the Congress.

I would say that due to the sensitivities about the CIA engaging in any kind of covert operation, we're tending to render our system less effective than it should be. If we believe in helping the Contras, I think we probably should do more, but that does not include trying to assassinate anybody.

Q: In your experience with the CIA, has the CIA ever advocated assassination for political purposes?

A: I never knew the CIA to advocate assassination under any circumstances. They did — I discovered long after the fact — accept for a very small unit of a few people a charge to try to assassinate [Patrice Lumumba] in Africa and Fidel Castro in Cuba — two people, neither of whom was assassinated by the CIA.

My feeling is that CIA kept this extremely secret and was very ineffective at it [assassination] because CIA is essentially a group of people organized to collect important information in the field that is being hidden from the United States, and to take political actions to try to make people better understand what American interests are overseas and what others like Castro are doing to undermine American interests overseas.

That's what the normal covert political action is about, a war of propaganda, if you like, of political information. Assassination has never played a part in CIA planning, and I hope it never will. It's not a game that democratic forms of government are likely to win.

It may be that we are likely to be victims of such efforts. I think that terrorist tactics and the possibility of assassination of our political leaders indicate that the CIA ought to be studying this matter very hard, but I've never seen it as a weapon in the American arsenal. They are... quite reluctant and, in fact, were rather inefficient in trying to do so 20 years ago.